

## A STUDY ON SUJANI EMBROIDERY OF BIHAR AND MODIFICATION IN ITS DESIGNS AND TECHNIQUE FOR REVIVAL

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### ABSTRACT

*The study was undertaken to revive the traditional art of Bihar, termed as Sujani. Traditional designs have endless possibilities of inspiring countless creations through re-interpretations, re-translations and adaptations. With this in mind, an attempt has been made to enhance designs with contemporary styles inspired from an age old craft of Bihar region commonly known as Sujani of Bihar. Sujani is a traditional craft of Bihar, which mainly depicts stories and in the past has been used extensively to spread awareness about social issues. Initially a detailed survey was carried out by visiting Bhusuda village craft clusters in Bihar, where this craft originated and is practiced. Motifs suitable for use through textile ornamentation, present on the traditional samples were identified and collected. The motifs derived from the traditional samples were then categorized and modified into its stylized forms using CAD. The designs thus created were then used to embroider the samples. Hand embroidery, machine embroidery, hand embroidery with embellishments and combination of hand and machine embroidery were the techniques used for embroidering the samples. A detailed study on the consumers' acceptability of the designs and techniques thus created underway. Best-selected designs and technique were then used to develop embroidered stoles, which were then assessed. All the evaluations were tested through two way-ANOVA tests. There was a significant difference in the acceptability of the final products.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Sujani, Traditional Embroidery, Design Modification & Craft Revival*

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### INTRODUCTION

Every region in India has its own distinctive style of embroidery, embodying its unique cultural essence. Delicately or densely patterned, with muted or vibrant shades, these designs have a universal appeal. No wonder then, that they have survived the onslaught of time<sup>[10]</sup>.

There are two traditions of folk embroidery in Bihar-Kashidakari and Sujani. The former uses the cross-stitch on a red, green, yellow or blue surface. The material and yarn are all new and brightly coloured. This stitch is used to embroider caps for newly born boys, blouses for the bride and such like<sup>[9]</sup>. Sujani instead is similar to the kantha of Bengal. The unstitched, un-sewn length of cloth, with its thick colourful border, is not thrown away when it frays. Instead, the borders are removed and several saris are folded into layers and quilted with a needle and thread<sup>[9]</sup>. Sujani is a term for straight running stitch embroidery on layered cotton. Women quilt together old sari and other pieces of cloth with tiny running stitches, and embroider these beautifully. The product is a quilt-cum-bedspread; sometimes stuffed with a tattered cloth to give it added thickness<sup>[8]</sup>.

Sujani is an age-old practice among women of Bihar and what make it remarkable is the unique narrative elements in its embroidery. Women stitch their experience, their sorrows and their realities on the Sujani,

transforming a mundane quilt into a testimony of their lives. Old Sujanis had motifs from religion, nature and daily life<sup>[8]</sup>. Today design depict details of village life and Hindu epics, social issues like female infanticide, election violence, education of girl, scenes of domestic abuses dominate the designs. Lessons of health care, parables about environment and images of women struggling for their right are very empowering. This is very interesting and encouraging because it comes from Bihar, where dowry cases and instances of female infanticide are widely prevalent<sup>[2]</sup>.

Since this craft of Sujani embroidery is well known over the world but the need is to document the original motifs, fabric, technique and colors used in contemporary fashion. Hence keeping the above points in mind this study on Sujani craft of Bihar has been formulated with the following objectives: to explore and document the organization of the industry, manufacturing techniques, colours and designs used, their significance, status and welfare benefits of the artisans of Sujani embroidery of Bihar; design intervention by developing the embroidery motif modifications and to create arrange of embroidered swatches using traditional and contemporary designs in traditional and contemporary colour combinations; mechanization of technique by developing the embroidery swatches using machine embroidery and surface ornamentation; to compare the traditional swatches with the newly developed ones and to find out the acceptability of the developed range of samples and to develop and assess products such as stoles using variations in Sujani embroidery for upliftment of the craft.

## METHODOLOGY

‘A Study on Sujani Embroidery of Bihar and Modification of its Designs and Techniques for Revival’ was undertaken in two phases. The first phase of the study was an exploratory field study to acquire a comprehensive insight into the traditional and contemporary state of the art and artisans. The study reviewed the organization of the industry, manufacturing techniques, colours and designs used, their significance, status and welfare benefits of the artisans. The second phase of the study focused on motif and design modification and thereafter product development. The following methodology sets forth the methods and procedures undertaken for the collection and analysis of data with the objectives of the study in mind.

In **Phase I** of the study, a visit was conducted to Bihar to gain first hand information about the craft. The study was conducted in Bhusuda village and Baghakhal village, Muzzafarpur where the craft of Sujani originated and there are small craft clusters engaged in the embroidery in these villages. Fifteen artisans from Baghakhal and Bhusuda villages were interviewed. A visit was undertaken to MVSS (MahilaVikas SahiyogSamiti) which is a small autonomous society based in Bhusuda and its office is located in Bhusuda only. This organization works entirely on Sujani and its revival and also provides financial marketing assistance to many women embroiderers of Bhusuda. A detailed interview schedule (open-ended) was formulated to know more about the art from the artisans concerning their background and manufacturing techniques. Data was collected through open ended interview schedule with non- participant observation. These tools were chosen keeping in mind the low literacy level of the artisans and descriptive nature of the expected answers. Data regarding the origin and history of the embroidery was collected through review of literature by referring books, journals, online web journals, other published and unpublished matter, web sources, MVSS (MahilaVikasSahiyogSamiti) located in Bhusuda, Muzzafarpur. Data collected through interviews and non-participant observations and was subjected to a detailed content analysis.

**Phase II** of the research was undertaken in the following stages:

### **Preparation of a Questionnaire**

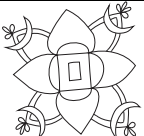

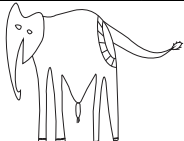

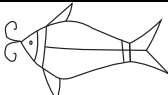



A structured questionnaire was framed to gather information regarding awareness on Sujani embroidery amongst the respondents (hundred college students).

### **Collection of Sujani Motifs**

The motifs of Sujani were selected from various sources such as, information collected from available literature, web sources and field survey conducted in the Phase I of the study.

### **Adaptation of Sujani Motifs into Contemporary form using CAD**

The four selected motifs of Sujani were modified and adapted to create stylized motifs (Figure 1). The designing into contemporary form was done through CAD software i.e. Corel Draw (Version X-8).

Original Motif	Stylized Motif
	
	
	
	

**Figure 1: Modified Motifs**

### **Arrangement of Modified Motifs in Different Layouts**

Each of the four modified motifs was arranged in a layout for stoles. Four different arrangements were made for each modified motif.

### **Evaluation of the Developed Layouts**

The developed layouts were evaluated by a panel of thirty judges including textile experts, textile designers, manufacturers of embroidered textiles and boutique owners. One best layout from each of the four selected category was used to apply them on stoles. All the designs were ranked according to their scores attained. A five point Scoring Performa was used for this purpose as given in Table 1. The attributes on which the evaluation of layout designs was done were arrangement/placement of the design, appropriateness or suitability of designs for particular product and overall aesthetic appeal.

**Table 1: Rating Scale for Evaluation of Developed Layouts, Samples and Assessment of Developed Products**

Rating	Score
Excellent	5
Very Good	4
Good	3
Fair	2
Average	1

### Development of Embroidered Samples and their Evaluation

The four contemporary motifs (one from each category) and the four original traditional motifs were used to develop embroidered samples with following specifications:

**Category 1:** Execution of Sujani hand embroidery on cotton fabric (Figure 2)

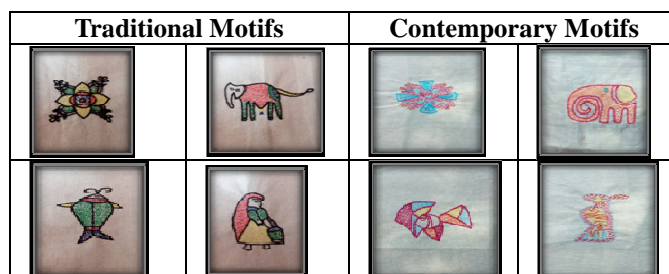
**Category 2:** Execution of Sujani hand embroidery on silk fabric (Figure 3)

**Category 3:** Execution of Sujani hand embroidery with surface ornamentation (Figure 4)

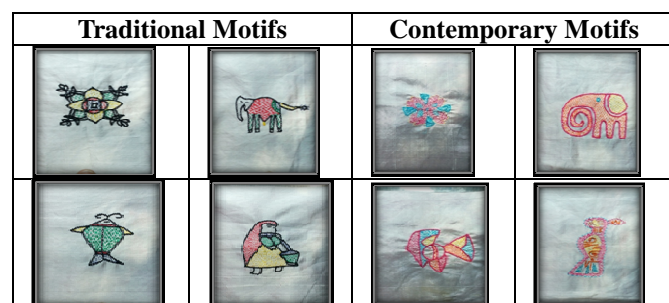
**Category 4:** Execution of Sujani using machine embroidery (Figure 5)

**Category 5:** Execution of Sujani using combination of hand and machine embroidery (Figure 6)

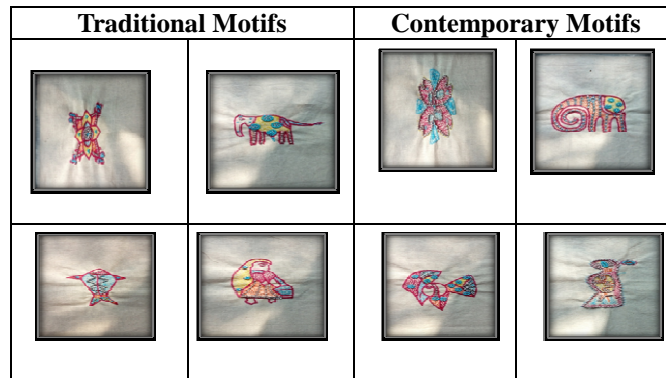
Colours used were of two combinations: traditional and contemporary colours. All the samples were ranked according to their scores attained by the same panel of judges as before using rating scale as given in Table 1. The attributes on which the evaluation of embroidered samples was done were neatness of embroidery, clarity of design and overall aesthetic appeal.



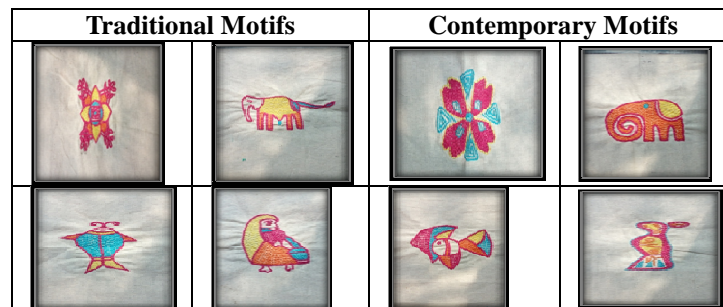
**Figure 2: Execution of Sujani Hand Embroidery on Cotton Fabric (Category 1)**



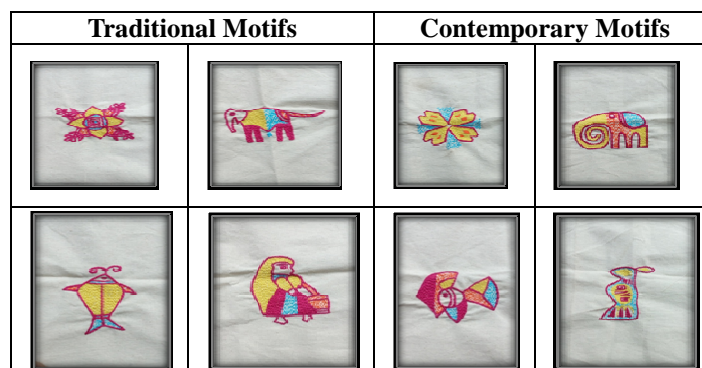
**Figure 3: Execution of Sujani Hand Embroidery on Silk Fabric (Category 2)**



**Figure 4: Execution of Sujani Hand Embroidery with Surface Ornamentation (Category 3)**



**Figure 5: Execution of Sujani using Machine Embroidery (Category 4)**



**Figure 6: Execution of Sujani using Combination of Hand and Machine Embroidery (Category 5)**

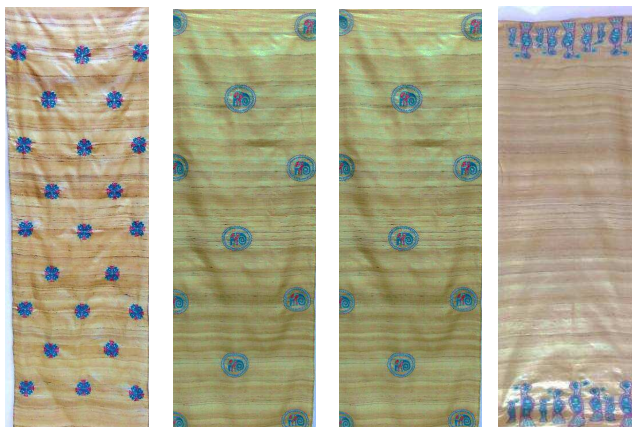
### Product Development and Cost Calculation

The selected layouts and technique were used to develop four stoles and costing was done (Figure 7).

### Acceptability of Developed Products

The acceptability was seen through an assessment Performa subjected to the hundred respondents. The attributes considered for rating were neatness of embroidery, clarity of design, design suitability, fabric appeal, colour combination, overall appearance and cost of the product.

**Analysis of Data:** The data collected was subjected to detailed statistical analysis by using Percentage, Ranking, Pie diagram, Bar diagram and two-way ANOVA.



**Figure 7: Developed Embroidered Stoles**

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Phase I of the Study

Many facts were gathered by interviewing artisans of Sujani embroidery who were located in Bihar. It was a useful study as it helped to realize the shortcomings of Sujani embroidery and to work more on that.

**Origin:** According to the findings of the phase I study, Sujani embroidery originated in Bhusuda which is situated at a distance of 30 kilometers from Muzzafarpur railway station in the state of Bihar. Further, 10 kilometers away from Bhusuda is another village named Baghakhal where also this embroidery is practiced. There are a number of small craft clusters spread across the surrounding areas of Bhusuda besides Baghakhal, namely –Hasna, Ramnagar, Durganagar, Dahiya, Kothiya, Chidaila, Jarang where this embroidery is practiced.

**Technique:** At present, raw material, which is used as a base fabric for Sujani, is usually made of cotton, locally known as “salita cotton” which is a coarse cotton fabric (count 44/50). Embroidery threads are procured from Muzzafarpur market. Usually Anchor or Dolly embroidery threads are used. Few tools required for making the end product are sewing needles (No. 9/10), embroidery frame, scissors, pencil markers, chalk powder, tracing paper etc. The designs are transferred onto the fabric by drawing it directly onto cloth with pencil marker or are traced using tracing paper and pores are made with needles. It is transferred onto the desired fabric by placing the tracing sheet and rubbing a thick mixture of blue chalk powder with kerosene onto the tracing paper. The pores in the tracing sheet absorb the chalk powder resulting into the creation of outline of the designs onto the fabric. The background is filled with the fine running stitch with thread whose colour is similar to the background. It gives a wavy effect. Chain stitch usually in black, brown and red thread is done for the main outline of the motif and the design is then filled with running stitch in coloured threads. Sujani is labour intensive; the number of stitches per square inch varies from 105-210.

**Problems and Prospects:** Problems faced by Sujani artisans are lack of education, lack of fund and problems due to regular floods.

Initially MVSS was started with approximately two thousand women embroiderers. But later this reduced to around 250 women embroiders due to lack of market demand. Recent buyers include few entrepreneurs and fashion designers specializing in traditional embroideries. Some popular article made of Sujani are cushion covers, bed spreads, dupattas, stoles, sarees and ladies kurta yokes.

**Phase II of the Study:** Important findings of the study were as follows:

#### **Awareness on Sujani Embroidery**

- Majority of the respondents (eighty percent) were not aware of Sujani embroidery.
- Amongst the respondents who did not like the embroidery reasoned lack of overall appeal of the embroidery for not liking it. And reason of liking the embroidery was because of its intricacy, bold patterns and its traditional background.
- Fifty one percent of respondents amongst those who knew about the embroidery, were interested in seeing innovations in Sujani embroidery.
- According to the general preference of the respondents, sixty four percent respondents liked contemporary designs more than the traditional designs.

#### **Assessment of Developed Samples**

Forty samples showing five different techniques of embroidery: hand embroidery (T1), hand embroidery with surface ornamentation (T2), machine embroidery (T3), combination of hand and machine embroidery (T4) were developed and evaluated (Table 2). From the survey it was concluded that combination of hand and machine embroidery was ranked highest (Table 1)

**Table 2: Preference towards Embroidery Technique**

T	Neatness	Cost Effective	Aesthetic Appeal	X (cum)	Rank
	WS	WS	WS		
<b>T1</b>	267	270	261	3.55	IV
<b>T2</b>	312	285	294	3.96	II
<b>T3</b>	345	291	306	3.77	III
<b>T4</b>	276	288	285	4.18	I

*T: Technique; WS: Weighted Score*

Therefore, the technique of combination of machine and hand embroidery was used for the final products. This probably could be because the respondents felt that the combination was keeping the tradition of hand embroidery alive, yet with the use of some machine embroidery, products could be more cost effective and sellable. Though the cost of hand embroidery with surface ornamentation was higher, still it obtained 2<sup>nd</sup> rank. Respondents preferred it over the traditional hand embroidery (rank 4).

From the survey conducted on developed samples, it was evident that majority of respondents preferred the sample SA7 (contemporary fish motif), sample SB5 (contemporary floral motif), sample SC8 (female figure motif), sample SD8 (contemporary female figure motif), SE8 ((contemporary female figure motif) amongst all the samples of category A,B,C,D and E respectively as per the mentioned attributes.

#### **Assessment of Developed Layouts**

From the conducted survey, it was obtained that most chosen stole layouts were- LA1, LB4, LC1 and LD1 amongst all the stole layouts of each designs.



### Assessment of Developed Stoles

As per the preference of techniques in embroidered samples and layouts of stoles judged by respondents, four stoles were embroidered on Tussar silk fabric using cotton embroidery threads. From table 6, it was seen that stole with female figure border design (P4) was chosen by majority of respondents amongst all the other developed stoles. All the evaluations were tested through two way-ANOVA test. There was a significant difference in the acceptability of the final products.

### CONCLUSIONS

Sujani is expensive in markets because of its time consuming factor, intricacy and hard work. However, if we explore more on the different techniques of embroidery to make it more commercially available, we can help retaining the age old tradition of Bihar. Therefore, the attempt in this study to use combination of hand and machine embroidery can be explored as it creates a good blend of the traditional hand work as well as creates a greater market by using some mechanization.

This would also provide employment opportunities to many rural women in underprivileged areas of Bihar where poverty issue is one important factor. Sujani craft has all the potential to create its impact and can become commercially accessible too if it is explored more towards the use of techniques and designs by retaining its natural charm.

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